Clean energy is the future — why are we investing in fossil fuels?

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FULL TEXT

I don’t know about you, but I have to say I’m a bit confused these days. In fact, in political terms, I really don’t know whether I’m coming or going.

Am I coming out of a fossil fuel-addicted world into a greener cleaner one, or going back to fossil fuels as the only default position to keep Canada financially afloat in the face of a fascist’s tariffs?

I know which direction almost 80 per cent of us want to be headed, but I’m not sure our provincial and federal leaders agree, given all this talk about gas and oil pipelines cutting through environmentally sensitive northern lands and mega-mining projects in Ontario’s “ring of fire” —peatlands that store a staggering 35 billion tonnes of the world’s carbon.

So I’m left asking —is this the only way we can cut loose from the U.S. and cope with a trade war, or are our leaders simply taking the easy way out? Easy in the sense that it’s all too familiar, seems to be pragmatic and, at least in the short term, may more or less maintain our standard of living.

In the somewhat longer term, it won’t be easy at all, given that we live in a world that’s already blown past the 1.5 degree Celsius mark above pre-industrial levels, and crossed several of the seven thresholds that measure the distance between a climate emergency and climate chaos.

Given the latter reality, I find myself asking a couple of simple questions —why aren’t Mark Carney and Wab Kinew talking about a clean energy revolution as a way to beat the tariffs and trade war? Why isn’t Carney talking about a bolder vision, challenging the government to work together to retool Canada’s economy and set our country up to become a world leader in clean energy and green technology?

Now, maybe I’m naïve, and god knows I’m no economist, but it seems to me, as I’ve said before, that if Canada was able to blast forward from an agrarian based economy to an industrialized one in just six years during the Second World War, why can’t we do the same now?

I mean, we’ve got a lot of smart Canadians who would likely rise to the challenge and there are quite a few highly skilled Americans looking for a way out of the current political nightmare in their own country, who could be recruited to the cause.

And transitioning to clean energy like solar and wind doesn’t just make environmental sense, it’s also a financially smart, given that renewable energy is now 41 per cent cheaper and just as efficient. It’s also more secure, because as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently observed — “There are no price spikes for sunlight, no embargos on wind.”

In fact, countries like Denmark and Germany have already demonstrated that the transition to clean energy works by generating 50 per cent to 67 per cent of their power needs with solar and wind.

Canada, meanwhile, is generating a paltry seven per cent to 11 per cent of its total electricity with alternate sources. This when Atlantic Canada is deemed to have some of the best wind power potential in the world and the Prairies have excellent prospects for solar.

Not to mention the fact that clean energy technologies offer numerous business opportunities for economic growth, which also expands Canada’s trade options.

Just look at China where investments low carbon manufacturing as well as solar and EVs have created new and

booming markets.
And the irony is that the vast majority of Canadians want a renewable energy transition to happen. According to the Pembina Institute, even 70 per cent of Albertans are worried about their heavy dependence on oil and gas, and more than 80 per cent think their government should be planning for new opportunities for energy workers.
Which suggests to me that most Canadians know the world is undergoing an energy transition and are worried that our country will be left in the dust by Europe and China where efforts to reach Net Zero are accelerating.
Look, the truth is we don’t have much time to get this done, given that climate driven, extreme weather events —from flash floods in Texas, to the massive forest fires in Manitoba —are accelerating. So instead of building pipelines and mining one of the world’s largest carbon sinks, maybe we should be focused on investments that will bring Canada into an economically stable, low carbon future.
Maybe it’s time for our leaders to halt the fool’s errand of looking to the past for short-term, carbon-heavy solutions, and start talking to Canadians about a just transition to clean energy. One that will guarantee a better, safer, more secure future for our grandchildren.
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